

Tattered American Flags Being Collected by County

COUNTY — Residents with tattered, torn and otherwise damaged American flags can drop them off at eight Union County locations for proper disposal through Tuesday, June 14, Flag Day.

Clearly marked receptacles for the flags are located at the Union County Courthouse, the Courthouse Annex, the Union County Administration Building, and the Andrew K. Ruotolo, Jr. Justice Center at the County Complex in Elizabeth. Another receptacle is located at the County offices at 300 North Avenue East in Westfield.

"We do this as a sign of respect for our flag. These discarded flags will be turned over to the American Legion for proper disposal," said Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi, chairwoman of the Union County Courthouse Centennial Committee.

The Courthouse Centennial Committee will host a special Flag Day ceremony in the Courthouse Rotunda on June 14 at 1:30 p.m. Members of several veterans organizations will participate and the featured speaker will be Jack McGreevey, Deputy Chief of Staff of the New Jersey Veterans of Foreign Wars, and father

of the former governor. The ceremony will include a colorful display of service flags and American flags dating back to the turn of the 20th century.

"As we continue to celebrate the history of the Courthouse, it is only fitting that we honor the symbolism of the flag," said Union County Freeholder Chairman Rick Proctor.

According to the U.S. Flag Code, "when a flag has served its useful purpose, it should be destroyed, preferably by burning." The American Legion considers Flag Day ceremonies to be "a particularly dignified and solemn occasion for the retirement of unserviceable flags."

The Flag Day ceremony is part of an ongoing series of activities celebrating the Union County Courthouse's 100 years as a center of law, justice and government in Union County.

A Courthouse Centennial and Cornerstone Capsule Exhibit will be on display through Friday, December 9. The exhibit includes unique artifacts from a time capsule buried in 1903, as well as memorabilia celebrating the past 100 years of history in Union County.



A SUCCESSFUL DAY...Senior Girl Scout Jessica Graham displays a service project of hand-sewn health-aid bags that were decorated by Girl Scout troops that attended the "From Stress to Success" Wellness Workshop. The bags were filled with donated toiletries that will be sent to the victims of the tsunami in Southeast Asia.

Jessica Graham Earns Gold With Wellness Workshop

WESTFIELD — As her Gold Award project, Senior Girl Scout Jessica Graham of Westfield recently held a Wellness Workshop event at Westfield High School for fifth grade Junior, Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts to earn the "From Stress to Success" Interest Project Badge.

Ten Girl Scout troops, all from Westfield, rotated among various stations during the event, which included a morning and afternoon session. They learned exercises, heard discussions and saw demonstrations that coincided with each of the seven categories of the badge.

All girls who attended earned the Interest Project Badge. Each session began with a speech by a local chiropractor on how stress affects the body. Dr. Eric Whitehouse and Dr. Stan Nosal were the participating chiropractors.

Afterwards, the girls were divided into groups and attended stations on "Fitness and Nutrition," "Skin Care," "Yoga" and a "Healthy Eating Table."

Girls then completed a "Service Project" of decorating hand-sewn "Health-aid Bags" that are being filled with donated toiletries for victims of the tsunami in Southeast Asia. The girls who attended brought donations for the health-aid bags. To conclude the sessions, all the girls participated in a group meditation session.

Dentists Dr. Adam Feret, Dr. John Wiley and Dr. Timothy McCabe of Westfield, and Dr. Andrew Kleiman

of Clark donated toothbrushes, toothpaste and dental floss.

Stop & Shop of Westfield, Shop Rite and Pathmark of Garwood, Wal-Mart and Super Stop & Shop of Watchung donated gift cards for Jessica to purchase toiletries to put in the health-aid bags. On The Side, a spa located in Westfield, and the Nelson Family of Westfield were generous donors to this project as well.

Jessica Squitieri, General Manager of On The Side, was Jessica's mentor for this entire project. Instruction was given by Claire Gotay at the skin care station, Kara Hermes at the fitness station and Stephanie Evert at the yoga station. All are On The Side staff members.

Assistants for the event included Hannah Vickers, Megan Valenti, Erin McCloskey and Becky Cass, all of Westfield. Jessica devoted more than 75 hours to planning and implementing this project.

To earn the Girl Scout Gold Award, Jessica had to complete at least four Interest Project badges pertaining to her project. She had to earn the Career Exploration Pin, the Senior Girl Scout Leadership Award and the Senior Girl Scout Challenge Pin, all as prerequisites to her Gold Award project.

A member of Girl Scout Troop No. 681 of the Girl Scouts of Washington Rock Council, Jessica is the daughter of Linda and Frank Graham of Westfield. Her troop leader is Malissa Cass. A townwide ceremony will be held in Westfield on Tuesday, May 31, to honor all Gold and Silver awardees.

Age Discrimination Suit Settled by County of Union

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders voted last Thursday to settle an employment discrimination lawsuit brought by a county division and weights employee for \$150,000. The board also voted to increase funding by \$10,000 in a case involving a second employee suit in the same department.

A jury awarded Maria Todaro \$378,000 in January, following her suit filed in 2002. Ms. Todaro, a Westfield resident, filed a lawsuit after she was not promoted to the position of Supervisor of Weights and Measures. The job was awarded to Michael Florio, the son of Union Township Mayor Joseph Florio, a Democrat. Ms. Todaro is a registered Republican.

She told a *Star Ledger* reporter that she believed that Director of Public Safety Harold Gibson had been instructed to give the superintendent's job to Mr. Florio due to his political ties to the Democrats. Democrats have had the majority on the freeholder board for the past decade.

The *Leader* has learned that the Todaro case is still pending as Ms. Todaro's legal fees, which will be picked up by the county, have to be negotiated. The original jury award may also be lowered as part of the final settlement an undisclosed source told *The Leader* and *The Times*.

Frank Capece, who represented the county in the matter, and David F. Corrigan, have both declined to discuss the case. County legal fees are now at \$45,000 for the case.

Mr. Freitas' case was one of age discrimination, *The Leader* was told by the undisclosed source.

Bruce Paterson of Garwood said the county had to pay out the settlements due to what he termed "patronage jobs," a reference to Mr. Florio.

"It's a shame what is going what is going on with the county and state," Mr. Paterson said.

Mr. Paterson also said he attended a vigil for Eddie Sinclair outside the George Herlich Juvenile Detention in Elizabeth. Sinclair was found hanged in his cell on Mother's Day of 2003, having been placed in the center only 12 hours earlier because of a bicycle theft.

"It is a very sad occasion what happened a few years ago," Mr. Paterson told the board. He said Sinclair's mother, Yolanda Padilla, has said she still has not received an incident report concerning her son's death from authorities. Mr. Paterson suggested that the county put up a plaque in Sinclair's honor when the new detention center is opened in Linden.

He said the county was negligent in the teenager's death due to a faulty sprinkler head in Sinclair's cell.

Vincent Lehotsky of Rahway noted that the cost of housing juveniles at

the center is \$156 per detainee.

In other business, the board introduced an ordinance concerning the prohibition of dumping of materials into the sanitary sewer system along county highways.

The county prohibits the spilling, dumping or disposing of materials other than storm water into the sewer system along county highways and property. Under the amendments, to be voted at the board's Thursday, May 26 meeting, county employees found guilty of violating the ordinance face dismissal, salary reductions or suspensions.

In addition, violators would face fines of between \$250 and \$500. Additional penalties can be imposed for each additional day the violation occurs, occurring to the ordinance, including 90 days in jail, 90 days of community service, or both fines and penalties.

In a related action, the board also introduced an ordinance to prohibit illicit connections to the municipal storm sewer systems operated by the county. These connections include domestic sewage, non-contact cooling water, process wastewater or other industrial waste.

Violators would be subject to the same penalties as in the illegal sewer system dumping ordinance.

The board also voted to support S-2144 and A-3556, also known as "Christopher's Law." The legislation has been sponsored by Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21, Westfield), Senator Nicholas Scutari (D-22, Linden), Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) and Assemblyman Eric Munoz (R-21, Summit).

The county resolution was sponsored by Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford. The legislation is named after Christopher Williamson of Cranford, a 12-year-old boy killed on June 14, 2004 when his bike was hit by a van that was being driven by an unlicensed driver.

"I'm hoping this law is going to be enacted," Freeholder Kowalski told *The Leader* and *The Times*. She said although "nothing can bring Christopher back" the legislation could prevent parents in the future from facing similar circumstances.

Freeholder Nancy Ward of Linden said she would be sponsoring legislation to have schools offer African-American Studies to quell increased violence, including gang violence that has been on the rise.

Freeholder Ward said Elizabeth High School does not have such course. Plainfield High School offers a course but only as an elective, which requires successful completion of several prerequisite courses. Because of these restrictions, Freeholder Ward said at-risk youths would never have the opportunity to take these courses.

Freeholder Ward said the first step to curbing gang violence "is to give them back their history."

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